

# HOW THE DEMON RUM SAVED JACK ABERNATHY

**If a Gun Fighter Had Not Bought a Flask of Whiskey and a Bit of Its Cork Had Not Clogged His Revolver the Famous Marshal Would Have Died in a Duel**

It would be difficult to pick out the most adventurous happening in the life of Marshal Abernathy, whose whole life has been one series of adventures.

The character of these can be imagined when it is said that since his appointment to office he has made more than one thousand arrests, thirty per cent of which were for murder, and the majority of the prisoners were of the general character of the desperate criminals and bad men of the West.

Born in Central Texas and brought up by his pioneer ranchman father on a ranch in Western Texas, he has lived the full life of the frontier that merged at last into the rough and tumble civilization that now prevails in the Territories.

This story was drawn from him with difficulty, and that it should be chosen from any of the many others which are well known tales of Oklahoma is due to the fact that it deals with his narrowest escape from death.

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**A** GOOD many folks don't approve of rum. Lots of folks who know what they're talking about and all of those who don't will tell you that the little red demon lurking in the bottle works nothing but evil for mankind.

But when Jack Abernathy hears any one light into rum and call it out of its name and trot out all the bad results the lecturer can think of due to it he smiles unto himself a comfortable smile. He knows better.

Now, Jack Abernathy himself is no devotee of the dousing bowl. He couldn't afford it. He would find it too expensive. A man who has to be ready at any minute to handle yeggs and bookers and killers, with members of various kindred professions that make life interesting in Oklahoma, who have no cause to love him, isn't apt to be convivial. The practice would be likely to make him just the fraction of a second slow on the trigger. And the reason Jack Abernathy is still pretty much alive is the fact that he always is up to his best speed and always has been.

Still, it should be recorded that Jack Abernathy has nothing to say against rum. As United States Marshal of Oklahoma he is not allowed to lead temperance meetings, so he doesn't. He wouldn't, anyway. He remembers, does Jack, that once upon a time he looked pointblank into the eye of death when all his courage and gun cleverness could not save him and when nothing but a fantastic accident traceable to the aforesaid red demon, saved him from — But this is the story.

On the eve of New Year's Day, 1910, two men were leaning against the side of a shack in an unfrequented back street of Oklahoma City. They lounged there peacefully enough, hands in pockets, apparently met to exchange remarks about the weather and enjoy an evening smoke. They were ruggedly built and dressed in rough, travel worn garments. As smudged against the darkness by the uncertain rays of a distant lamp, their faces were strong and lean and heavy jawed, with quick, predeceous eyes. Their attitude, for all its ease, suggested watchfulness and something subtly furtive and alert. Cattle or railroad men they might have been, unmistakably of active life and the open spaces of the West.

"What's gone with Quigg?" asked one who wore a greasy red necktie with some affectation of style about the faded collar of his blue flannel shirt.

"Hub; still plastered from last night, like's not," returned the other in a tone of deep disgust.

"Didn't you tell that runt he'd got to stay sober?"

"Sure I told him, plenty. I gave him leave to stay soused for the next year if he'd keep off the stuff to-day."

"He ain't safe, what?"

"D'y' mean talk?"

"Yes."

"Nothing in it. Why you could feed it to him through a hose and every time he took a breath he'd never say a word 'cept ask for more. Talk? No. It never hits him in his talk works. He's pretty flighty when he's dry and nervous, but not when he's wet."

"I don't like it, you hear me?" returned the wearer of the necktie. "I don't like going on the job with a barrel."

**Quigg, the Gun Fighter.**

His companion shrugged broad shoulders. "Ain't no one can handle soup like him. I've worked with men who thought they knew something about it. Why, they couldn't load a brass cannon 'longside of Quigg. He does it like cracking a peanut. And, say, he can shoot. You know it."

"Well, he don't go if he ain't sober."

The other looked down the street toward the lamp. "Here he comes now."

A figure detached itself from the night and sidled up to the two. The newcomer was a little man, muffled in an absurd overcoat many sizes too large for him. He held his head forward on a thin neck at an inquiring angle that gave him the appearance of a turkey poult after a warm. He wore a cap pulled tight over his eyes.

"That you, Carpenter?" he asked. "Who you got with you?"

"Yes, and shut up, and it's Dieback," growled the one who held such a high opinion of the little man's soup abilities.

"Been hittin' the booze?" asked Dieback, suspiciously.

"Naw, I ain't," snapped Quigg. "What's it to you?"

"If you have you don't go, that's what."

"Say, none of your—"

"Aw, dry up," interposed Carpenter, quickly. "He's all right, Dieback. He ain't scrappy only when he's sober."

"Ain't had a drink all day," said Quigg, nervously. "Not a one."

"And that's a safe bet. You're jumpy enough," returned Carpenter. "Did you bring your outfit?"

"Did I bring my head?" rasped Quigg.

"Then we'd better hike for Harrow," said Dieback.

The three started off down the street toward the railroad yards. Two blocks further along they came abreast of a window whereon a dingy yellow jet of light etched out the words "Larry's Cafe." Quigg's steps slackened.

"I'm going in here a minute," he said.

"You'd do nothin' of the kind?" was the prompt response of Dieback as he caught the little man roughly by the arm.

Quigg stood still and peered up at him in the reflected glare.

"Say, son," he began, with a tone of patronage that would have been ludicrous had it not held a certain grim quality of conviction, "my last legal keeper was planted down in Texas two years ago, and I ain't been able to stand the thought of another since."

Dieback dropped his hand quickly. "All right; go as far as you like," he said; "but the whole thing's off, you hear me?"

"Look here, Quigg, you ain't going to queer the game, are you?" interposed Carpenter. "We'll never get a soft thing like this again."



With a Crash Six Weapons Began an Interchange of Civilities

the old hands they were. First they made a circuit of the bank, satisfying themselves that no watchman lurked in the background. The officers kept close and were not discovered. Then one of the visitors stood on the curb holding something that glittered evilly in his hand and the other two crouched down against the door.

For the next ten minutes there was no change in the disposition of the forces. The gentle grate and clink of metal showed the progress of sapping at the bank's outer defenses. Then, with a rattle, the door swung inward and the guard came back from the curb. Apparently the smallest of the three burglars was managing the affair. Before permitting the others to enter he went inside and brought out a chair. This he placed on the sidewalk. From the inner pockets of his overcoat he drew out several small objects with infinite tenderness and placed them carefully upon the chair. Having accomplished this ceremony, which the watchers observed with great respect, he motioned the way within.

ran up to the sidewalk as this other crumpled up and with his deputies sent a rattle of shots down the street after the fugitive. The Marshal's shotgun was empty, and he had thrown it aside. He had his magazine revolver out, and he pumped at the runner, who was Dieback, until he brought him down. As Dieback fell Abernathy's weapon was empty.

**Exit Quigg.**

At this instant the Marshal in the heat of fighting had worked up almost to the steps of the bank. Now he faced about to find, half hidden in the entrance, a little man, who held him covered with a big, old fashioned revolver. The little man was Quigg. It was one of those seconds that seem in retrospect to have stretched out into aeons. Abernathy knew Quigg—knew he was a crack shot. A tyro could not have missed at the distance. The big Marshal heard the burglar chuckle, saw the gleam of the blue steel barrel in the cold moonlight and saw the finger crooked about the trigger—all details took their place in a picture at which he seemed to have been gazing for hours. There was no fear in him, no hope, no emotion of any kind. He waited, helplessly.

The hammer fell. There was a click. As if poised on springs Abernathy leaped at Winters, who had not seen clearly what was passing, snatched the pistol from him and, turning it on Quigg, pumped a stream of lead into him as the burglar levelled again. Quigg screamed and jumped from the doorway. The Marshal met him, closed with him and, grasping the burglar's weapon, strove to win it.

Quigg's strength was great. Now it was that of a fiend. The two spun and wrestled in a terrific struggle, Quigg striving to bring his gun into play, Abernathy bending all his power upon the wrist. And then, suddenly, the thing was over. The Marshal felt his opponent go limp in his grasp and collapse. Abernathy caught him and lowered him to the ground. But Quigg had died on his feet, while still fighting.

The Marshal took account of a glance. Jones was down, badly hurt. Winters was wounded. Quigg was dead. Dieback, up the street, lay groaning in pain. At the foot of the steps was Carpenter. Abernathy bent over him.

"Where'd you get it?"

The wounded man pressed a hand to his breast. "I'm through," he said quietly.

"Did you know me?"

"Sure," answered Carpenter. "We knew you the minute you sung out."

"Why didn't you throw up your hands?"

"We saw it was three to three and we figured we had as good a chance as you. Say," he added, weakly, "you better look out for that chair there. Lucky some one didn't kick it over."

When Abernathy examined the chair, which had not been disturbed in the conflict, he found upon it the packages Quigg had placed there, enough nitroglycerine to have blotted the town of Harrow off the map.

Carpenter died of his wounds four hours later, after having given all the details of the burglars' movements to the Marshal. It had been their purpose to rob the Post Office after cleaning out the bank. Dieback was picked up in a serious condition, but later recovered. He is now serving his time in prison.

Abernathy is not a man who wastes much time in fumbling around what might have been. But he had a considerable curiosity concerning the failure of Quigg's pistol, to which he owed his life. The revolver, he found, had been carried in the little man's right hand overcoat pocket. In this pocket was an empty whiskey flask, stopped with a crumbly, worm-eaten cork.

When Abernathy came to examine the weapon closely the mystery was cleared. In beside the plunger of the mechanism was a tiny piece of the cork. It was wedged firmly in such a manner as to interfere effectively with the discharge of the revolver. When Quigg pressed the trigger the plunger was crowded by this inconsiderable obstacle and fell with diminished force upon the cartridge. The blow was enough to dent the cartridge cap, but just failed of sufficient force to explode the fulminate.

**As to the Rum Habit.**

And so it is that the United States Marshal of Oklahoma has nothing to say against the rum habit. He believes it is all very well, like many other ill matters, at times and occasions. For if Quigg had not insisted upon buying the whiskey he would not have had the flask in his pocket, and if he had not had the flask there would have been no cork, and if there had been no cork there would now be no Jack Abernathy.

"I have had bullets come so close to my head that I could feel the wind of them," he says, "and I have had them do all sorts of funny tricks that were almost home runs against my side. But I was never so close to passing out as I was the time I saw that gun against my heart and heard the trigger click."

"That little piece of whiskey bottle cork was the only thing that kept me where I can enjoy three square meals each day."



"Would You Take Postage Stamps?" Asked Quigg

Abernathy carried his favorite equipment, an automatic shotgun, with shells loaded with buckshot, and a magazine revolver of large calibre. That revolver was the Marshal's tried friend and true, and he understood it as only a man can who has had to depend upon a weapon time and again. Among other notable exploits in his manipulation he had once used it to drill a moonshiner, three times aiming by the flash of a gun eighty yards away, in dead darkness.

The little force proceeded by a roundabout route to their destination, arriving soon after the New Year had been ushered in on a stiff wind. Harrow is one of those virtuous towns that celebrate New Year's by going to bed an hour earlier than usual. There was no blubulous soul abroad in the streets as the Marshal mapped out his plan of campaign, which was simple enough.

**Cornering the Burglars.**

Jones he placed well down the street at one end. Winters at the other. He took up his own position opposite the post office in the shadow of a brick block. There were scudding clouds that obscured the moon, but from time to time he had a clear view of the plain, square structure that represented the sacred dignity of the government.

It was about one o'clock when Jones came gliding back from his post along the dark side of the street and told Abernathy that he had seen three figures skulking into the town from his end. The word was passed to Winters, and the officers took cover in a doorway, keeping sharp watch.

The moon sailed out of retirement presently, and in its thin light they made out the three whom they had come to welcome. The visitors kept close together on the bright side of the street and headed toward the post office. Several doors from that building they came in front of one of Harrow's two small banks. It was an ordinary bank but one story in height, plainly built and none too strongly barred.

The visitors stopped before its door and gathered in consultation. "By jinks! they're going to try the bank first," whispered Winters.

"Parlaying," suggested Jones.

Abernathy warned them to silence. The burglars had evidently come to an agreement and they proceeded about their work in a businesslike manner. Like

"I'll have no pal loaded on a job," insisted Dieback.

Quigg snarled at them. "Who's going to get loaded? I ain't had a drink all day and I'm cold."

"If you go in you'll stay till your skin's full," said Dieback.

"The'll with you!" snapped Quigg, with emphasis, thrusting his face at Dieback. The other making no reply, he turned his back upon him and spoke to Carpenter. "Now I'm going in and get a little flask to take along. I'll be out in two shakes. If you two jaspers want to wait, well, you can."

Quigg trotted away and passed through the swinging door, grumbling as he went. The place was empty save for the fat, putty faced barkeeper who nodded familiarly at Quigg and put down his newspaper.

**The Wormeaten Cork.**

"Gimme a flask, Ike," said the customer, flipping a quarter on the bar. The attendant looked at the coin dubiously, as he reached for an empty flask. While he filled it he studied Quigg with some attention.

"Can't slip me that five you borrowed a year ago, can you, Quigg?" he asked.

"Naw," said Quigg, sucking in his lips as he followed the pouring of the red stream with avid eyes; "I'll pay you to-morrow."

"Yes, you will," remarked the barkeeper, sadly.

"What in tobacco tags?"

"Would you take postage stamps?" asked Quigg, absently, his attention still on the whiskey.

The other glanced at him quickly, but made no reply. He finished filling the flask and groped in a drawer for a cork, which he drove in with his fist.

"Say," grated Quigg, as he seized the bottle, "can't you stop it decent? This here cork's worm eaten."

"All I got," replied the barkeeper. "It ought to keep as long as you'll keep the whiskey."

"That's so," grinned Quigg, with sudden good humor. He stuffed the flask into one of the capacious side pockets of his overcoat. "It won't last long." He started for the door, but stopped to ask, "How far is it to Harrow?"

"Not far. Maybe an hour," answered the barkeeper. Quigg nodded and disappeared into the night.

After the departure of his customer the barkeeper gave evidences of a strange aberration. For fully five minutes he stared motionless at the door through which Quigg had gone. For five more minutes he stared at the ceiling, his fat face puckered in lines of mental effort. Then he took to scrubbing his bar briskly, stopped to scratch his chin and proceeded with greater energy. Finally he threw down his rag with a throaty exclamation and faded into the shadows at the end of the room. Thence might have been heard presently the click of a telephone receiver and in due time this cautious monologue:—

"You better see Leahy, d'y' hear? And if there's anything in it I'm halves, d'y' see? What? Well, Quigg's up to his old game again. I said he's on the old trail. Sober all day, first I've seen him in two years. Post office? Yeah. No, at Harrow. Harrow. Yeah. Maybe I am, but I ain't piped. Halves, I said."

Some hour or so later United States Marshal Jack Abernathy, acting on information received from Leahy, the post office inspector of the district, set out from Oklahoma City for the little town of Harrow with two of his best deputies, "Chris" Winters and John Jones. All three men went heavily armed.